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RELIGIONS ANCIENT AND MODERN

Suniti Kumar Chatterji
Aug. 1916

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THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

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THE RELIGION OF ANCIENT GREECE

Introductory.

Scope of the Book.—The present sketch does not aim at any complete survey, however brief, of the facts of Greek religion; it is not a handbook. Still less does it aim at setting down in an elementary form the rudiments of the subject; it is not a primer. Rather it is, in the Greek sense, a *historia* — an inquiry into the nature of Greek religion; an attempt to see whence it came and whither it tended; how it resembles and how it differs from other religions. Especially its object is to ask and, if it may be, to answer the question: "What in Greek religion is characteristically Greek?"

Two Factors in Religion: Ritual and Mythology.—Every religion contains two elements. There is first what a man *thinks* about the unseen, his theology, or, if we prefer so to call it,

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his mythology; second, what he *does* in relation to this unseen—his ritual. In primitive religions, though these two elements are clearly to be distinguished, they are never, or very rarely, separable. In all living religions these two elements are informed and transfused by a third impulse—that of each man's personal emotion towards the unseen, his sense of dependence on it, his fear, his hope, his love.

Greek Mythology studied hitherto to the exclusion of Ritual.—The study of Greek religion is still young and struggling. To many ears the very words "Greek religion" ring with a certain dissonance. But the study of one part of Greek religion, of its mythology, is old and honoured. How does this come to be? The answer is simple, and in the sequel it will be shown to be significant. Some knowledge of Greek mythology is necessary to the understanding of classical Greek literature. The scholar, even after the most rigorous application of grammatical rules, was still occasionally driven to look up his "mythological allusions." Hence we had, not histories but *dictionaries* of Mythology. Mythology was regarded not as a subject worthy in itself of study, not as part of the history of the human mind, but as "ancillary," as of some service to literature. Nothing so effectually

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starves, a subject as to make it occupy this "ancillary" position.

Greek Mythology formerly studied through a Roman or Alexandrian Medium.—Until the last decade it was usual to call Greek gods by Latin names. We need not spend time in slaying dead lions; the practice is at an end. Jupiter, we now know, though akin to, is not the same as, Zeus; Minerva is nowise Athena. But a subtler and more dangerous error remains. We are still inclined to invest Greek gods with Latin or Alexandrian *natures*, and to make them the toy-gods of a late, artificial and highly decorative literature. The Greek god of Love, Eros, we no longer call Cupid; but we have not wholly rid our minds of the fat mischievous urchin with his bow and arrows—a conception that would much have astonished his worshippers in his own city of Thespiae, where the most ancient image of Eros was "an unwrought stone."[1]

Three disabilities, then, have atrophied and well-nigh paralyzed the study of Greek religion. First, instead of studying religion as a whole we have studied only one part, Mythology. Second, even Mythology was not studied rationally, as a

[1] Pausanias, ix. 27, 1.

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whole, but in scraps to explain "allusions." Third, such Mythology as was studied was seen distorted through the medium of Alexandrian and Roman literature. To read a paragraph of Lemprière is to wonder that a study reduced to such imbecility could still keep its hold on the human mind.

Influence of Modern Scientific Methods.—The study of religion as a whole is a tardy modern growth. So long as religions were divided into one true and the rest false, progress was naturally impossible. The slow pressure of science introduced first the comparative, then the historical method. The facts of ancient and savage religions being once collected and laid side by side, it became immediately evident that there were resemblances as well as differences, and some sort of classification was possible. Then came the historical impulse, the desire to see if in religion also there existed a law of development, and if the facts of religion succeeded each other in any ascertainable order.

From this intrusion of the comparative and historical methods, two religions long held themselves aloof: Christianity, as too sacred; classical religion, as forming part of an exclusive stronghold, which was supposed to stand in some strange antagonism to science. Greek and Latin religions,

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as different perhaps as any two religions could be, declared themselves one. Dying of this unnatural partnership, and of their self-imposed isolation, they at last consented to join hands with the rest of humanity and come to life again. Greek religion is now studied as a whole, not as merely mythology; as part of the spiritual history of the human race, not as the means of interpreting a particular literature; as contrasted, not as identical, with the religion of the Romans.

Accession of New Archaeological Material.—The study of Greek religion owes much not only to reform in method, but to a very large recent accession of material, material which has again and again acted as a corrective to mistaken views, and as a means of modifying mistaken emphasis. To take a single example: the discovery and study of vase-paintings alone has forced us to see the Greek gods not as the Romans and Alexandrians, but as the early Greeks saw them. We realise, for example, that Dionysos is not only the beautiful young wine-god, but also an ancient tree-god, worshipped as a draped post; that the sirens are not lovely baleful mermaidens, but strange bird-demons with women's heads.

Excavation, that used to concern itself with works of art only, now seeks for and preserves every scrap of monumental evidence however

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humble. This has focussed our attention on ritual. We discover and study not only the Hermes of Praxiteles, but masses of terra-cottas and bronzes, showing the local type under which the god or goddess was worshipped; we read inscriptions relating to local rites disregarded by Homer and the tragedians.

Specially important in their influence on the study of Greek religion have been excavations on *prehistoric* sites. The poems of Homer were, as will presently be seen, the great medium through which the popular religion of Greece was fixed. Excavations, begun by Dr. Schliemann on the site of Troy and culminating now in the excavations of Dr. Arthur Evans at Cnossos, have taught us something of the religion of that civilization which preceded Homer. Homer, therefore, is no longer the starting point in the history of Greek religion.

Specific Character of Greek Religion.—For clearness' sake it may be well to state at the outset the conclusion to which our inquiries will tend. The *material* of Greek religion, in its two departments of theology and ritual, is, in the early stages of its development, much the same as that of other nations. We find ghosts and spirits and nature-gods, ancestor worship, family religion, tribal religion, anthropomorphism, the

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formation of a pantheon, individual religion, magical rites, purifications, prayers, sacrifices—all the common stock and the successive phases of religious humanity. What is characteristic of the Greeks is not the material, but their handling of it. Among the Greeks, religious imaginations and religious acts, though never perhaps without their influence on conduct, tend to become the impulse of two quite other forms of human activity—forms, both of which are often, though wrongly, regarded as alien to religion. These two forms are *art*, both literary and plastic, and *philosophy*. By the action of art and philosophy savage elements are eliminated, and, by this purgation from ignorance, ugliness and fear, religion became, not only powerless to harm, but potent exceedingly for good.

I. Mythology.

Current Conceptions of Greek Mythology.—The words "Greek Mythology" bring to the minds of most of us the gods as they are in Homer. We think of Zeus with his thunderbolt, father of gods and men; of Hera, his wife, queen of heaven; of Poseidon, the sea-god, with his trident; of Athene with spear and shield and aegis; of Apollo with his bow; of his sister Artemis, the maiden hunt-

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ress; of Ares, god of war; of Aphrodite, goddess of Love; of Hermes, the beautiful young messenger with winged sandals. We visualize Olympus, where this divine family dwells and feasts together, somewhat vaguely, as, partly the top of a great mountain, partly a place remote in the skies. In all this we think rightly, for so the Greeks of classical times thought themselves, though, as we shall later see, it is not the whole truth.

Herodotus on Greek Theology.—Fortunately for us, Herodotus, under the stimulus of foreign travel, and specially of his visit to Egypt, came to reflect on the origin of his own religion. He has left us this significant statement—

"*But as to the origin of each particular god, whether they all existed from the beginning, what were their individual forms, the knowledge of these things is, so to speak, but of to-day and yesterday. For Hesiod and Homer are my seniors, I think, by some four hundred years and not more. And it is they who have composed for the Greeks the generations of the gods, and have given to the gods their titles and distinguished their several provinces and special powers and marked their forms.*" [1]

The chapter in which these words occur is a

[1] Herod. ii. 53.

veritable little manual of Greek religion, and will form throughout the basis of our examination.

Greek Theology largely a Literary Conception.—Herodotus strikes the key-note of our investigation; the theology of the Greeks, what they *believed* as to the gods, their origin, character, habits, attributes, appearance, was, in the main, the outcome of literature, the work not of the people, nor yet of the priest, but of the poet. Theology was a thing "composed" advisedly, "put together," by a number of epic singers; and this process was, according to Herodotus, a thing of "to-day and yesterday," fairly complete some nine centuries before Christ.

Current opinion (*ta endoxa*), when fairly examined, generally shows some vestige of truth. We have noted the traditional tendency to study Greek mythology apart from ritual and as ancillary to literature. Now we see how this came to be: Greek mythology is, on the showing of Herodotus, largely the outcome of literature. It is for this reason, in addition to its greater familiarity, that our investigation begins with mythology rather than ritual. But, if the religion of Greece, and especially its theology, is mainly made by Homer, what was the material out of which he made it? No one supposes that Homer *created* the gods; he only "*composed* their

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generations" and marked their forms? What, then, were the gods before Homer?

The Gods before Homer.—Herodotus again informs us. He knows of a people inhabiting Greece before Homer, and their theology, as Herodotus describes it, is in marked contrast to that of Homer. "*Formerly*," he writes, "*the Pelasgians, on all occasions of sacrifice, called upon* theoi (gods), *as I know from what I heard at Dodona; but they gave no title nor yet any name to any of them.*" There was a time in Greece, if we may trust Herodotus, when a people dwelt there called Pelasgians, and when this people worshipped gods who were not individualized, not called by proper names such as Zeus and Athene, nor even by vaguer titles such as "the Grey-eyed One" or "the Loud Thunderer," when, in a word, the gods were Things, not Persons. Can we believe Herodotus? Broadly speaking, we can, because, in the main, he is confirmed by philology, comparative religion and prehistoric archaeology; but the precise sense in which we are to accept his statement requires explanation.

The Undifferentiated Gods (*theoi*).—Herodotus derives the word *theos* from the root *the*—"to place" (*tithenai*)—the gods "placed or set in order all things." Here we must reluctantly part com-

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pany from him. Plato[1] says that the earliest inhabitants of Greece, like many of the barbarians, had for their gods the sun, moon, earth, the stars and heaven, and that these were called gods because they were always "running about" (theein =run). His statement as to the existence of these primitive gods is instructive, though his etymology is only amusing. The word for gods—*theoi*—is more probably merely a variation of a root, meaning, in the different derivatives, "prayer," "spell," "sacred," or "taboo" (*festus*). The *theos* is the being at the back of these magical or religious processes; the being whose existence is implied by them; the sanction of the prayer, the spell, the curse, the taboo.

The study of comparative religion shows that man does not at the outset attribute complete personality to the things he worships. Personality comes with the giving of human or animal form. Before complete impersonation, we have "animism," when the gods are intangible Things, powerful but not personal, dwelling anywhere, everywhere. These Things are scarcely, in our sense, gods; but they *become* gods wher man enters into relation with them, localizes them, fixes them by some form of worship. Wholly

[1] Plato, Krat, 397 D.

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personal they scarcely become until an artist makes of them some image, however rude, or a poet takes them as material for a story. With animism is closely connected fetich-worship. Man imagines that the spirit-things he vaguely conceives of dwell in chance natural objects, and chiefly in stones or trees.

Pelasgian Worship of Fetich-stones and Pillars.—At Pharae, in the second century A.D., Pausanias [1] saw an image of Hermes, the market-god. It was of square shape, surmounted by a head with a beard. Close to the Hermes were about thirty square stones, and these the dwellers at Pharae revered, "giving to each stone the title of a god." [2] In even earlier days, Pausanias adds: "By all the Greeks the honours due to the images of the gods were paid to unwrought stones." At Thespiae, it has been already noted, the image of Eros was an unwrought stone; at Orchomenos,[3] where was a very ancient sanctuary of the Charites or Graces, their images were stones that had fallen from heaven.

The square, limbless "Hermes" was a step in advance of the unwrought stone. Pausanias [3] tells us that the Athenians, zealous in all matters of religion, were the first to "use the square-

[1] vii. 22. 4. [2] ix. 38. 1. [3] iv. 33. 4.

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shaped images of Hermes"; they taught the rest of Greece. The Arcadians,[1] another primitive Pelasgian people, were "specially partial" to the square form of Hermes. Hermes then, the beautiful young messenger of Homer, with golden rod and winged sandals, was, in Arcadia and Athens, a "Herm," a boundary stone or pillar, a thing to mark the sanctity of a spot, whether it were street or market-place or tomb; so was Apollo of-the-Ways, and Poseidon, and Athene, and the Sun, and Herakles. Who was it wrought the transformation, made the symbol a person? "Homer," says Herodotus; "Homer," says Pausanias[2]. "As to Hermes and Herakles—the *poems of Homer* have given currency to the report that the first is a servant of Zeus, and leads down the spirits of the departed to Hades, and that Herakles performed many hard tasks." The reference is obviously to a wider Homer than merely the Iliad or Odyssey.

Minoan and Mycenaean Pillar-cult.—The cult of the nameless undifferentiated *theoi* was Pelasgian; in Greece, as in other places, it preceded the worship of full-blown human gods. From the earliest days, in Pelasgian Attica and Arcadia, and, indeed, all over Greece, there had been a worship of tree-

[1] viii. 48. 6. [2] viii. 32. 4.

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trunks,[1] of unwrought stones and limbless square pillars. To this testimony of literature we finally add the witness of prehistoric archaeology. The Mycenaeans and the subjects of the Cretan Minos worshipped trees and pillars at least a thousand years before the poems of Homer were written. The trees have perished, the pillars survive to-day.

The Lion-Gate of Mycenae.—Most familiar of all the monuments of prehistoric Greece is the famous Lion-Gate of Mycenae; yet it is usually misunderstood. In the pediment of the gate is a Doric column, standing on an altar-like basis: at either side is a lion. We call the monument the Lion-Gate, but it might be called a pillar-sanctuary. The heraldic lions guard the pillar as much as, or more than, the gate. The pillar is a *theos*. It is of peculiar shape; it *tapers downwards* like the human body. And note a curious fact. The square "Hermes" of Hellenistic days, when the artist became conscious and archaeological, also *tapers downwards;* it is the lineal descendant of the pillar. On a seal-impression found by Dr. Arthur Evans in Crete, the pillar has come to life as a goddess; she stands on a rude heap of stones, what the Greeks called a *hermaion*,[2] and, like the pillar, she is guarded by

[1] Xen. *Mem.* I. 1–14. [2] *Etym. Mag.*, sub. voc.

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the heraldic lions. She is the *Lady of the Lions*, worshipped later as Rhea in Crete, as Cybele in Asia Minor. The undifferentiated *theos* has developed for itself sex and even personality.

Ritual of the Pelasgian Theoi.—The ritual of the unwrought stones in Greece was much the same as that paid to sacred stones all the world over. At Delphi [1] was a sacred stone on which the Delphians poured oil every day, and at each festival they put unspun wool on it. Offerings were placed round the pillars and "Herms," or hung upon them. In this early stage there is no clear distinction between god and altar. Moreover, the unwrought stone often marked a grave, so that hero-worship and pillar- or Hermes-worship are scarcely to be distinguished. Over the grave of Melanippus,[2] near Thebes, were three unwrought stones. Over the grave of the sibyl Herophile [3] stood a square "Hermes." Besides the more regular ritual of the unwrought stones, the prayer and anointing and sacrifice, they were believed to have all manner of magical powers; by them diseases were healed, the pollution of blood was purged away and the madness that came from pollution.

In the ritual of the unwrought stones, the

[1] Pausanias, x. 24. 6. [2] ix. 18. 1. [3] x. 12. 6.

pillars and "Hermae," as in their shape, there is nothing specifically Greek, nothing again that necessarily points to foreign influence. Jacob, when he had dreamed of the ladder between earth and heaven and angels ascending and descending, that is, when he was sure he was in a sacred spot, set up a stone, anointed it with oil, and called the place Beth-El, the House of God.[1] It is even probable that the Greeks got their word *baetyl* from the Semitic *Bethel;* but the *custom* of stone-worship is world-wide—characteristic, it would seem, of human nature in an early stage of development, rather than of one race or group of races.

"Barbarian" Influence helps to differentiate the Theoi.—By the instance of the "Lady of the Lions," we have seen that Pelasgian religion, within its own limits, began to give form and personality to its gods. But we are very far from the diversity, complexity, and highly developed humanity of Homer's Pantheon. Did Homer complete the work of differentiation himself? Not even Herodotus thinks this. Herodotus took trouble to find out; he went to Dodona, the most ancient oracular sanctuary of Greece, and there the priestesses told him that,

[1] Genesis, xxviii. 18, 19.

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in course of time, the Pelasgians, with their nameless undifferentiated *theoi*, "*learnt from Egypt the names of the other gods, and, much later, that of Dionysos.*" They asked the oracle at Dodona whether they might adopt the names that came from the barbarians, and the oracle said: "Adopt them, *and from that time they used the names of the gods when they made sacrifice.*"

Herodotus believes that his primitive people, his Pelasgians, got the names for their undifferentiated *theoi* from abroad, from non-Greek-speaking peoples, barbarians, and chiefly from Egypt. A little before the passage quoted he has said, more definitely, that the names of all the Greek gods, except Poseidon and the Dioscuri, Hera, Hestia, Themis, the Charites and the Nereids have always existed in Egypt. Poseidon, he says, came from Libya, the rest were Pelasgian; hero-worship, he adds, did not exist among the Egyptians. Hermes also, he later adds, was Pelasgian. The very fact that he makes careful distinctions inclines us to think that in his statement is some kernel of truth.

About the primitive "Pelasgian" origin of Hermes in his "Herm" form there can be no doubt; the Charites, it has already been noted, were originally stones that had fallen from heaven. The undue stress Herodotus lays on Egypt is

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accounted for by the two facts that his informants were mainly Egyptian priests, and that the oracle of Dodona, at which he also inquired, was closely analogous to, and doubtless in close communication with, the oracle of Zeus Ammon at the Oasis in Libya.

Literary Evidence of Oriental Influence.—We are apt foolishly to resent the notion that Greece borrowed from the East. Such resentment is part of our exclusive classical tradition. Only slowly have we come to see that the most original and most artistic of peoples, as of individuals, borrow most. The Greeks themselves gloried in their borrowings and frankly acknowledged them; the legends that told of contact with the East were cherished, not ignored, and the truth embodied in these legends is constantly confirmed. Io, the ancestor of the Argives, wanders to Egypt, she bears a son, the swarthy Epaphos, whose very name is a Graecized form of the bull-god of Egypt, Apis. Her descendant Danaos returns with his fifty daughters to Pelasgian Argos, and the people who were once called Pelasgoi are henceforth Danaoi. Cadmus comes from Phoenicia seeking Europa; he founds the Cadmeia, the citadel of Thebes. Close to Thebes has been discovered and excavated the sanctuary of the Semitic "Great Gods," the Kabeiroi, Father, and Son.

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In the Iliad [1] Egypt is only mentioned once, but in that one instance Achilles speaks of the wealth and splendour of "Egyptian Thebes,"—as though it were as familiar as that of Orchomenos and Pytho. In the Odyssey [2] it is told as a natural adventure that Menelaos, in his home-coming, wandered over Cyprus and Phoenicia and Egypt and reached the Sidonians and Erembi and Libya. The mixing bowl of silver that Achilles [3] set for a prize was "cunningly wrought by artificers of Sidon," and "men of the Phoenicians brought it over the misty sea and landed it in harbour." With all this travel and traffic the wonder is not that there was foreign influence, but that it was not too great to be assimilated, and that it did not paralyze rather than stimulate.

Archaeological Evidence of Foreign Influence.—Homer's world is a world touched at every point by the East and South, by Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Crete, Egypt, Libya. Recent excavations on prehistoric sites, Mycenae, Tiryns, Troy, Crete, Egypt, have shown that this contact existed long before Homer. We now know that the whole eastern and probably the western basin of the Mediterranean was, from Neolithic days, occupied by a people whose civilization was, broadly speaking, homogeneous, and that this civilization

[1] *Il.* ix. 381. [2] *Od.* iv. 83. [3] *Il.* xxiii. 741.

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continued substantially unbroken from Neolithic down to historic days. To this homogeneous civilization belonged the "Pelasgians" of Herodotus, and, though he did not know it, the Libyans, from whom came the god Poseidon. Sicily is the remains of a land bridge that in bygone ages united Europe and Africa; Crete was always a stepping-stone between North and South. At certain points in this primitive culture, notably at Troy, Mycenae, Tiryns, and in Crete, there emerged that peculiar, well-marked civilization which we call "Mycenaean," a civilization belonging to the Bronze Age, culminating in the second millennium B.C., already decaying before the time of Homer. What concerns us for the moment is this: that this early pre-Homeric civilization, as we see it at Mycenae and at Cnossos, is deep-dyed with Oriental and especially Egyptian influence. On the sword-blades, for example, found in a rock tomb at Mycenae, we find ichneumons hunting ducks; on a wall painting of the fifteenth century B.C., at Egyptian Thebes, we find depicted "Mycenaean" vases. If the "Pelasgians" of Herodotus did not borrow from the "barbarians," it was assuredly from no lack of opportunity. Traditions accounted merely mythological are seen, in the light of excavations, to be historically true.

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Pelasgian Religion taken over by the Hellenes.—Herodotus has told us of the *theoi* of the Pelasgians, their primitive undifferentiated character, and of the borrowings from barbarians. Before we come to Homer there is a third step in the development to be noted, and one more significant than Herodotus himself knew. "Later," he says, "*the Hellenes received them* (i.e. the gods and their names) *from the Pelasgians.*" Another question now confronts us: Who, as contrasted with the Pelasgians, were the Hellenes? What was their share in the making of Greek theology?

The Hellenes a Northern People.—Elsewhere in his history Herodotus [1] tells us that the Pelasgians "had never emigrated," but the Hellenes "had often changed their seat." They came from the North. "Hellen and his sons," says Thucydides[2], "grew strong in Phthiotis," i.e. in Thessaly. These Hellenes were the warriors who led the expedition against Troy, the first collective enterprise, according to Thucydides, that gave unity to Greece; their leader was Achilles. They were no branch of the indigenous Pelasgians, but immigrants from the North. Long ago Mr. Gladstone [3] pointed to Dodona as their early home in Greece, and noted also the clear analogies between the "Germans"

[1] Herod. i. 52. [2] Thucyd. i. 3.
[3] *Studies in Homer*, i. p. 553.

of Tacitus and the Hellenes, their great stature, their ruddy hair, their blue eyes.

What Mr. Gladstone dimly forecast, Professor Ridgeway in his *Early Age of Greece* has made a vivid reality. In material culture he has shown that the Achaeans of Homer differ in essentials from the Mycenaean Pelasgians and agree with the Celts of the North. The Homeric shield is round, the Mycenaean bipartite, shaped like the figure 8; the Achaeans are "well-greaved" or "bronze-greaved"; no greaves are found in Mycenaean strata; the Achaeans wear the breast-plate; this does not occur in Mycenaean finds; in Homer the safety-pin or fibula is a regular part of the dress of men and women; it only occurs in the latest Mycenaean finds coincidently with iron. Most important of all, in Homer the dead are uniformly cremated, the Mycenaeans bury their dead intact. In all these details Homer's Achaeans closely resemble the large-statured, fair-haired, blue-eyed populations of the North, whose blood is in our own veins. They are but an early offshoot of those tribes of Northern warriors who, later as Dorians or Gauls, again and again invaded the South and blended with the small, dark, indigenous peoples; blended with them and, it may be, saved them from being submerged in the great ocean of the East.

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Complexity of Homer.—To resume: before Homer, before the shaping of theology by literature, three factors went to the making of Greek religion. First and earliest, the primitive Pelasgian element; next, and at its early stages, perhaps, scarcely distinguishable, foreign elements from Libya, Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor; last, after millenniums of this fusion, successive impulses from the North. Such is the story as told by Herodotus, such are the facts as evidenced by archaeology. The characteristic thing about Greek religion is, not only or chiefly this diversity, but the all-important fact that, before the time when Greek history can be said to begin, these factors were already taken up by the imagination of a poet, transfused and transfigured till they became a kingdom rather of fancy than of faith.

Homer's Pantheon.—Homer, Herodotus says, "*gave to the gods their epithets and distinguished their several provinces and special powers and marked their forms.*" And why? Not consciously perhaps, but necessarily, because he gathered them together into one family, dwelling in one home, the Northern Olympus. To the Hellenes, Thucydides has told us, the Greeks owed their first national unity, and to this unity they owe the Pantheon, which caused the sharp

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differentiation of the gods. A local god or goddess is necessarily a god-of-all-work; he will be substantially the same as the local god or goddess of the next tribe or village. Bring them together and each will inevitably tend to specialize. Differentiated gods presuppose some sort of Pantheon; a Pantheon argues some kind of political federation.

A Pantheon favours, if it does not wholly cause, anthropomorphism, the giving of human shape to the gods. Forced by the condition of their worshippers into human and even political relations, they necessarily became human. Gods who, like their worshippers, attend a Boulé or an Agora must come in human shape. How artificial it all is, we may see in the 20th Iliad [1], where Themis summons all the gods to council on Olympus. She has to "range all about" to find them. Save Ocean, they all come; "every River, every Nymph of all that haunt fair thickets and founts of river and grassy water-meads," and they sit them down in the polished colonnades." The old *theoi*, the local potencies, have to do on human shapes; we seem to catch them at the very moment of hurried, uneasy metamorphosis. Even in the permanently human Olympians we note

[1] v. 3 ff.

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that in two of obviously foreign origin, Ares and Aphrodite [1], they tend to fly back from Olympus to their own local homes, to Thrace or Cyprus.

Northern Atmosphere of Olympus.—The gods dwell on Olympus, a mountain of Northern Thessaly; their head, Zeus himself, has his principal seat of worship at Dodona in Northern Epirus. Once awake to this Northern element in Homer, and we are no longer surprised to find in his Olympus a certain forecast, as it were, of the atmosphere of the Eddas. The gods of Homer, it has often been observed, are magnified men; but why are they so very big and so very boisterous? Simply because they are in part Northerners. Vastness, formlessness, fantastic excess are not "Greek" in the classical sense; they *are* Teutonic and Norse. When Poseidon, the Earth-Shaker, goes down to the battle [2] he shouts mightily "loud as nine thousand or ten thousand men cry in battle," and his shout "puts great strength into the hearts of the Achaeans." We remember how Tacitus [3] noted with amazement the "harsh note and confused roar" of the battle cry of the Germans with which they used to rouse their courage; it was "not so much an articulate sound as a general cry of valour."

[1] *Od* viii. 265 [2] *Il.* xi. 152. [3] Tac. *Germ.* iii.

Poseidon[1] takes but three strides to pass from Samothrace to Aegae, surely the gait of Northern giant rather than Greek god. Very Northern, too, are the almost Berserker rages of Zeus himself and the roughness of his divine vengeance. To wave his ambrosial locks and shake Olympus with the nodding of his brows may be both Greek and god-like, but how about such habits as "pushing the other gods from their seats," "tossing them about the hall," [2] hurling his son by the foot over the battlements of Olympus,[3] beating his wife and hanging her up with anvils to her feet,[4] suggesting that she "would like to eat Priam raw"?[5] Homer has such magic in his words that we are apt to forget that these are not the ways of Greek gods, however primitive, but the rude pranks of irresponsible giants. The old *theoi* have been indeed considerably "tossed about," and are none the better for the process.

Lack of Religious Feeling in Homer.—Critics have often noted that, in their human aspect, Homer does not take his gods very seriously. Zeus, on his atmospheric side, is as majestic as his own thunder; as husband and father he is lower than the mortals over whom he rules. "There is no

[1] *Il.* xiii. 11. [2] *Il.* xiv. 276. [3] *Il.* i. 580.
[4] *Il.* xv. 18–21. [5] *Il.* iv 34–36

god so *good*," Mr. Gladstone observes, "as the swineherd Eumaeus." The nearer the gods are to the nature-gods which they in part *were*, the more reverend they remain. Poseidon, who is half sea, half river, "moves in a kind of rolling splendour." Hephaestos as the divine smith is lame, and therefore, to the blunt taste of the Olympian observers, ridiculous; as the fire-god who fights with the river-god Xanthus he is a blazing glory. This lack of seriousness is in part accounted for, if we suppose that the gods are a blend of indigenous and immigrant elements. The bard is singing of divinities who are in part at least "other men's gods."

Racial Fusion unconsciously reflected in Homer.—Homer records no conflict with the North, but, quite unconsciously, he reflects it. To take one simple instance. Zeus and Hera, divine husband and wife, are in constant unseemly conflict. Why this conflict? From the human point of view the answer is easy and obvious. Hera is jealous, Zeus in constant exasperation. Man makes the gods in his own image. The real reason is quite other; the relations of Zeus and Hera reflect a racial conflict. Zeus, father of gods and men, Zeus, the sky-god, with all the heavy fatherhood of Wuotan, is a Northerner, though very early he blended

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with the local mountain-, oak[1]-, and thunder-gods of the Pelasgian population. Hera is indigenous, Pelasgian; originally she had no connection with Zeus. She reigns alone at Argos in her Heraeum, alone at Samos; her temple at Olympia is distinct from and far earlier than that of Zeus. At Dodona, the great oracle-sanctuary of Zeus, there is no Hera, only Dione, his shadowy but real and etymological wife. The conquering Achaeans come down into Greece and marry the daughters of the land. Zeus passing from Dodona to Thessaly with his warrior tribe, drops Dione at Dodona, and he, too, marries a daughter of the land. In Olympus, where she seems merely a jealous and quarrelsome wife, Hera is really a turbulent native princess, coerced but never subdued by an alien conqueror

Sometimes the older order of things is reflected in more gracious fashion. It is a touch of genuine courtesy in Zeus that, when he summons rivers and nymphs to Olympus, he forbears to compel the presence of old Okeanos "from whom all rivers flow and every sea and all springs and wells."[2] He might have compelled him, for even he, Okeanos, "hath fear of the lightning of great Zeus and his dread thunder."[3]

[1] Mr. A. B. Cook, *Zeus, Jupiter and the Oak*. Cl. Rev. 1903, 1904. [2] *Il.* xx. 7. [3] xxi. 195.

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Racial Distinctions survive in Ritual.—Ritual is always conservative. In the ancient ritual of the oath and, noticeably, on the side of the Trojans, we see the contrast between old and new. When Menelaos is about to fight with Paris he says to the Trojans: "Bring ye two lambs, one white ram and one black ewe, for Earth and Sun," and we will bring one for Zeus.[1] The Trojans, in whom the Pelasgian element predominates, still swear by the old nature-gods, and use the old "sympathetic" ritual of the black female victim for black Mother Earth, the white ram for the shining Sun. Earth and Sun, even if we write them with capital letters, can never be more than half humanized; but, it will be remembered, it was Earth and Sun that, according to Plato (p. 17), the early Greeks had for their gods.

Influence of Plastic Art on Greek Theology.—Greek theology, a complex blend of primitive Pelasgian, of Oriental, of Northern elements, was shaped by literature. But not by literature alone; plastic art soon lent its aid. Homer's gods are seen so clearly, in such lovely human shapes, and in an atmosphere so bright and vivid, they seem already like living statues. In

[1] *Il.* iii. 104.

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primitive sanctuaries, such as the Erechtheion, ancient Herms, pillars, unwrought stones remained, and down to late days were often the object of the actual ritual; but to them were added votive images in terra-cotta, in marble, in gold and ivory, of the gods as Homer had shaped them: of Zeus, with his thunder-bolt; Athene, with spear and shield and aegis; of Apollo, with bow and arrows. This is no mere conjecture. Tradition expressly states that[1] Pheidias, when asked after what pattern he intended to exhibit his Olympian Zeus, answered, "*By the pattern exhibited by Homer in these lines*: 'The son of Kronos spake and nodded with his blue-black brows, and his deathless hair waved from the king's immortal head, and he made great Olympus to shake.'"

Vase-paintings frequently show us the image and the actual worship of the old Pelasgian *theos*, the *herm* or pillar. Sometimes, fortunately, they let us see the actual process of transition from Pelasgian *herm* to Olympian human god. Two vases in the British Museum show the scene of the oath-taking of Pelops and Oinomaos before their chariot-race. On one vase,[2] between the two rivals, is an altar, and above it, not the image

[1] Strabo, viii. § 353.

[2] Brit. Mus. *Cat.* F. 331

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of Zeus, but a four-square pillar inscribed DIOS—"of Zeus." Here we have a herm made by its inscription to belong to Zeus. On the other vase [1] we have the same altar and the same pillar-herm; but there is no inscription, and on the pillar stands the figure of the wholly human Zeus. We see, as it were, the stratification of cults laid bare before our eyes.

II. Ritual.

Greek Ritual less Characteristic than Greek Theology.—What a people does in relation to its gods is not shaped by either poet or artist. Hence the ritual of the Greeks is far less characteristically Greek than their theology. From their ritual we learn rather how much they had in common with other peoples, though even in their ritual a certain gentleness and reasonableness of temper is observable. In the plain facts of ritual we learn, as already noted, more of that conflict of racial elements within the Greek people, a conflict compounded and smoothed over by the genius of Homer.

Ritual of the Olympians.—Ritual in Homer is simple and uniform. It consists of prayer, accom-

[1] Brit. Mus. *Cat* F. 278.

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panied by the sprinkling of grain, followed by an animal burnt-offering. Part of the flesh is tasted by the worshipper and then made over by burning to the god; the rest is eaten as a banquet, with abundance of wine. The object is to "persuade the gods," and to a Northern god there is nothing more persuasive than an abundant meal of roast flesh and wine. The method of offering is by fire, because the gods are heavenly gods, and the sacrifice must be sublimated to reach them. In all this there is nothing specifically Greek. Jahveh, dwelling partly on Mount Sinai, his Olympus, and partly in highest heaven, has his burnt sacrifice; his worshippers have their sacrificial feast. Civilized though the Greeks were, they never, save a few sectarians and philosophers, seemed to have realized the physical disgust of animal sacrifice; still less did they rise to the spiritual heights of "Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldst not, but mine ears hast thou opened." The gods were biddable, that was much; they were, on the whole, friendly and fairly rational; the worshipper was cheerful and hopeful.

Ritual of the Chthonic or Under-world Powers.—Herodotus knows of another ritual, bearing another name, addressed to quite other powers—the worship paid to dead men, heroes. This

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ritual he did not think was borrowed from the Egyptians; he expressly says, "They have nothing of the kind." In the course of his travels he found that Herakles was worshipped with different rites in different places; finally he came to the conclusion[1] that "those of the Greeks do most wisely who have set up a double worship of Herakles and who offer burnt-offerings to the one as an immortal and with the title Olympian, and to the other devote offerings as to a hero." The word *enagizein* translated "devote" means to make over, to consecrate; it has no exact English equivalent.

Herodotus recognizes that the ritual of an Olympian was quite distinct from that of a hero. Pausanias[2] fortunately tells us what that ritual was. When Phaestos came to the town of Sicyon he found the Sicyonians "devoting offerings to Herakles as to a hero." Phaestos "would do nothing of this kind, but would offer burnt-offering to him as a god. And, even now, the Sicyonians, when they slay a lamb, eat a portion of the flesh as though it were a sacrificial victim, but the other portion they devote as to a hero."

The distinction is clear. The hero takes all; you may not eat of dead men's food; the Olym-

[1] Herod. ii. 43. [2] P. ii. 10. 1.

pian shares the feast offered to him. Moreover, (an important point), the rites of the hero *preceded* those of the Olympian. Phaestos found the people practising a hero-cult, left them with Olympian rites. We are justified in saying that the hero rites belonged to the earlier Pelasgian stratum, the Olympian rites were developed or imported later.

Conflict of the Two Rituals.—Sicyon, at the very gateway of the Peloponnese, changed its ritual. It has also changed its name. In Hesiod's [1] time it was called Mēkōnē. A change of name implies a change of, or at least an addition to, population. At Mēkōnē Pausanias [2] tells us there was a primitive home-grown population; at Mēkōnē, Hesiod says, "Gods and mortal men strove together." The commentator on Hesiod tells us what the strife was about. It was decided at Mēkōnē "which gods should obtain mortal men as their portion." At Mēkōnē Prometheus played his trick on Zeus, persuading him to take for his portion in the sacrifice the thigh bones covered with fat, that is, the portion regularly allotted to the Olympians. Prometheus was of the old order of the Titans. The struggle between Titans and Olympians is over and past

[1] Hes. *Theog* 535 and Schol ad loc. [2] P. ii. 5. 5.

in Homer; Hesiod recounts it in detail. Prometheus was the friend of man against the tyranny of the "newer gods," the Olympians. He suffered because he gave to mortals for their own use the fire sacred to the sacrifices of the Olympian. Mēkōnē, later Sicyon, like many another place, saw the new worship of the Olympians imposed on the old cult of heroes.

Hero-worship and Inhumation.—The cult of the hero at his tomb supposes that the dead man is in some sense alive and locally present, that his spirit is either in the tomb, or in the Herm-tomb-stone, or hovering near, ready to be angered or appeased. When the dead are *buried* some such belief is likely to arise, and, indeed, in all parts of the world has arisen. The ghost of a man, strong in life, will be potent after death, and becomes a kind of god; he is part of the invisible, and, because he is so near, his descendants set up relations with him, bring him offerings and sacrifices. But the Greeks of Homer did not bury their dead—they burnt them. The body once burnt, the spirit did not abide in the tomb, but fled to a place far off, beyond a river, a place remote, inaccessible. The ghost of Patroklos[1] is explicit: "Never any more shall I come back

[1] *Il.* xxiii. 75.

from Hades, when ye have given me my meed of fire." A ghost thus remote and phantom-like, purged by fire of all human needs and sympathies, it was worth no one's while to worship.

The practice of cremation came, with many another clean, cold custom, from the North, from the Celts of central Europe, who dwelt in great forests where fuel abounded. The funerals of the Germans, as described by Tacitus,[1] the burning of the hero, sometimes together with his horse, on a great pyre, are the counterpart of the funeral of Patroklos. Cremation cleansed the survivors from the physical impurity of the dead body; it also freed them from that greatest fear of primitive man, the haunting terror of the ghost.

The Blood-curse and the Blood-price.—All ghosts are apt to be more feared than loved; an *enemy's* ghost is sure to be hostile, but most implacable of all is the ghost of a murdered man. According to the primitive view, blood, once shed on the earth, poisoned the earth, and especially poisoned the murderer fed on the fruits of the earth.[2] The murderer, like Cain,[3] was "cursed from the earth." For disease so bred there was no cure, unless like Alcmaeon,[4] the murderer

[1] Tac. Germ. 27. De Verrall ad loc.
[2] *Æsch. Choeph.* 64–68. *See*
[3] Genesis, iv. 11, 12.
[4] Paus. viii. 24, 819.

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could find "new land," like the "new earth," thrown up at a great river's mouth, unpolluted, and so able to nourish the murderer. The notion of the polluted earth was supplanted or, rather, perhaps, supplemented by the idea that the dead man's ghost became an embodied curse, an Erinys to haunt the murderer and to suck his life-blood. This blood curse knew no end; murder bred murder.

Of all this implacable, endless blood-feud Homer knows nothing. Instead, we have what seems a cold-blooded substitute, the blood-price. But the advance is a real one; the wrong done is acknowledged, atonement made, and an end is put to the endless, pitiless bloodshedding. Ajax,[1] in the Iliad, blames Achilles for his relentless spirit, and reminds him that a man accepts compensation from the slayer of his brother or for his dead son, "and so the manslayer for a great price doth abide in his own land and the kinsman's heart is appeased." Here, too, the advance seems to have come from the North. Tacitus[2] tells us that among the Germans "feuds are not implacable; even manslaughter is atoned for by the payment of a certain number of cattle and sheep, and the satisfaction is accepted by the

[1] *Il.* ix. 632. [2] Tac. Germ. xxi

whole family." This is no doctrine of the poisoned earth or the blood-haunting Erinys.

Ritual of Magical Purification unknown to Homer.—As Homer knows of no blood-curse, no haunting ghost, so he knows nothing of purification for blood-guilt or of placation to the angry dead. It is, indeed, notable that to magical purification—*the purification of spiritual evil by physical means*—he never refers. When Odysseus[1] has slain the suitors and hanged the bad maidens, he cleanses his home; but the cleansing is simple, natural, we might say scientific; the means employed are such as we might use to-day in disinfecting a polluted house; he uses water and brimstone. We hear nothing of what the ancients called "ceremonies of riddance," i.e. magical purifications.

Yet such ceremonies were common enough in historical Greece, and even formed part of the regular ritual of the state. When Plutarch[2] was archon in his own town Chaeronea, he had, in his official capacity, to preside over an odd ceremony, which, he tells us, was "largely attended." A household slave was taken to the common hearth of the city, beaten with stalks of *agnus castus*, a plant of purifying properties, and driven out of

[1] *Od.* xxii. 481

[2] Plut. *Quaest. Symp.* vi. 8.

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doors with the words: "Out with hunger; in with wealth and health." The rite was called the "driving out of" hunger. Such a ceremony has nothing to do with Olympian worship or even with the cult of the vaguest *theoi*. It is frankly magical. Moreover, it is nowise characteristically Greek. All primitive peoples are apt to think of evil, physical and moral, as a substance that can be transferred. The children of Israel [1] put their sins on the head of a scapegoat and drove him forth into the desert. The modern inhabitants of Pithuria, Dr. Frazer [2] tells us, at an outbreak of influenza make a small carriage, harness a pair of goats to it, drive it into a wood, and "Influenza" comes back no more.

Contrast of Olympian and Pelasgian Ritual.—Broadly, then, it is seen that in ritual, as in theology, there are two strata: we have an upper stratum of rites belonging to the Olympians, either actually imported or deeply influenced by Northern conquerors; and, second, a lower stratum of rites belonging to the indigenous Southerners. These last include the elements common to the East—worship of pillar and herm, of hero and ghost, ceremonies also that are purely magical, and that presuppose neither ghost nor god.

[1] Levit. xvi. 21.

[2] *Golden Bough*, 2nd edit. iii. p. 93 ff.

The orator Isocrates [1] knows of no racial conflict, yet he very clearly sets out the difference : "*Those of the gods who are the source to us of good things have the title of Olympians ; those whose department is that of calamities and punishments have harsher titles ; to the first class both private persons and states erect altars and temples ; the second is not worshipped either with prayers or burnt sacrifices, but in their case we perform ceremonies of riddance.*"

III. The Mysteries.

The Mysteries of Demeter and Dionysos.—So far, and certainly in the eyes of Isocrates, Olympian ritual may seem, as compared with chthonic, to be more advanced, more humane ; but, though rites of "riddance" have a harsh and barbarous sound, we cannot forget that this "riddance"—half physical though it is—has in it the germs of a higher thing, the notion of spiritual purification. This comes out very clearly in a class of rites of which Homer knew, or at least tells, nothing ; rites addressed to no Olympian—I mean the Mysteries. These Mysteries are in Greece connected chiefly with the names of a goddess and

[1] Isoc. *Orat.* v 117.

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a god who have no place in Homer's Olympus, Demeter and Dionysos.

A "mystery," even in its most primitive form, has always two parts. First, a preliminary purification; second, a rite in which certain sacred foods are tasted and sacred objects handled, or sights seen or words heard, which cannot be safely tasted, handled, seen or heard without this preliminary purification. The man in process of initiation was called, when he had been purified, a *mystes*, and when he had seen, tasted, handled, an *epoptes*, a beholder.

The Greeks had no creeds, no dogmas, no hard-and-fast formulation of belief. But in the case of the Mysteries they had what we should call a *Confiteor*, or avowal of rites performed. Fortunately, the "avowals," or, as the Greeks called them, the "tokens" of the Eleusinian Mysteries, are preserved. We know also what the preliminary purification was. Each candidate took down to the sea a young pig[1] and bathed with it. Sacrificer and sacrifice were together purified by sea-water. The ceremony was called *elasis*—driving; and when we remember the "driving out" at Chaeronea, the meaning is clear. It was a rite of "riddance."

The "tokens" or avowal of rites are for

[1] Plut. *Vit. Phoc.* xxviii.

Eleusis as follows: "*I fasted; I drank the Kykeon; I took from the basket . . . I put back in the basket and from the basket into the chest.*"[1] The fast was, of course, part of the purification; after this came two things, the drinking of the Kykeon and the handling of certain unknown sacred objects.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were "sacred to" Demeter, the Earth Mother, and Korè, her daughter. We, with our modern minds, should expect an Eleusinian creed to begin: "I believe in Demeter, the mother, and in her daughter, Korè; I believe that Korè for the third part of the year descended into Hades and rose again in the springtime." The Greek demanded an avowal of ritual acts done—on that chapter he was rigid; thought, imagination, he instinctively left free.

I Drank of the Kykeon.—This is the equivalent of "I tasted the first-fruits." The new grain was made into a sort of posset or *pelanos*. Till the time came for the solemn tasting, this new grain was under a *taboo*—forbidden food. Mysteries among the savages of central Australia are connected with the removal of certain taboos on food. The gist of the second act is less clear. We do not know for certain what the sacred objects

[1] Clement of Alexandria. *Protr* ii 18.

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handled in the mysteries of Eleusis were. From other mysteries we can conjecture. In the Thesmophoria they were objects symbolic of fertility—fir-cones and the like; in the Mysteries of Zagreus, objects that seem to us trivial—a ball, a mirror, a "bull-roarer"; but objects fraught, no doubt, to the initiated, with intense significance. Such objects are still in use at savage ceremonies of initiation.

But the Mysteries were not merely magical rites to promote the fertility of crops and the general material prosperity of man in this world; they also held out a hope—and herein undoubtedly lay the secret of their extraordinary influence—of help and guidance, nay, even of certain and substantial bliss in the dim shadow-land that lay beyond the grave.

The Mysteries and a Future Life.—We are nowadays apt to think that religion is necessarily connected with hopes and fears as to a life after death. Yet, in Homer's scheme of things, though we have theology and ritual, we have practically no *eschatology*. The gods, indeed, are, it is assumed, immortal, but good heroes do not go to Olympus to dwell with them for ever, nor are bad heroes sent down to Tartarus. In Homer, Tartarus is not a hell for the wicked, but simply the abode of rebel Titans. Later, it and they are transferred to

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Hades. Homer's heroes, good and bad alike, after death are merely shadowy images (*eidola*) "strengthless heads of the dead." Even the Pelasgian heroes, who live on locally as objects of worship in their own tombs, have no activities save in relation to their survivors. On them they depend for food and sustenance, to them they act as gods-of-all-work; for themselves we hear of no bliss, no eternal peace and rest.

Yet the Greeks of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. had, we know, a definite hope of future bliss and a less definite fear of future misery. These hopes and fears were communicated in the Mysteries. Plato[1] says: "Whoever goes uninitiated to Hades will lie in mud, but he who has been purified and is fully initiate, when he comes thither will dwell with the gods." Pindar[2] says: "Blessed is he, whoso having seen these things goes below the hollow earth; *he sees the end of life and the beginning given of the gods.*" In the Mysteries, it is clear, not only were sacred things tasted and handled, but some revelation was made of man's beginning as divine and of his end. Such a doctrine, alien to Homer and his Olympian system, was not developed out of indigenous hero-worship, nor out of a vague belief

[1] *Phaedo* 69c. [2] Frg. 102.

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in *eidola*. It came in with certain aspects of the worship of the two non-Olympian mystery-gods, Demeter and Dionysos; and it came mainly from the South, from Egypt, probably by way of Crete.

Cretan and Egyptian Elements in the Mysteries.—According to tradition [1] Demeter, no less than Dionysos, came as an immigrant to Attica; she was received at Eleusis by Keleos, he by Ikarios; their coming was in the reign of Pandion, that is, according to traditional chronology, about 1500 B.C. Demeter in the Hymn [2] says she came from Crete. The Cretans [3] claimed to have given the Mysteries to Greece. Moreover, they said that the rites, which at Eleusis and elsewhere in Greece were performed secretly as mysteries, had been among them from ancient days, "done openly and communicated to all." Crete for religion, as for civilization generally, was the stepping-stone from Egypt to Greece.

Demeter, Isocrates [4] says, brought to Attica "twofold gifts." These were "crops" and the "Rite of Initiation." He adds that those who partake of this rite have "fairer hopes concerning the end of life." An attempt has often been made to establish some inherent connexion be-

[1] Apollod. 3. 14. 7. [2] v 490. [3] Diod. v. 77.
[4] Isocr. *Panegyr.* 28.

tween the second gift and the first. The Greeks saw, it is thought, in the sowing of the seed and its uprising at spring-time, a symbol of the death and resurrection of man's body and soul. A simpler reason for the connexion lies to hand. Demeter gives her "two-fold gifts" because she borrowed them from Isis. Isis, the Egyptian goddess of agriculture, was also, as wife of Osiris, Queen of the Under-world. The Egyptians, possibly because their climate favoured the conservation of the body, developed very early a somewhat material doctrine of immortality, and this doctrine was intimately connected with the rites of the culture god and goddess Osiris and Isis. Diodorus[1] is, with some reservation as to details, right when he says that "the whole mythology of Hades" was brought from Egypt into Greece. The Mysteries of Osiris, he tells us, are the same as those of Dionysos, and those of Isis are just like the mysteries of Demeter, "the names only being changed." He adds: "In introducing the punishments of the impious and the fields of the blessed, Orpheus *is but imitating the things that took place at Egyptian funerals.*" One of these "things that took place" was the burying of portions of the *Book of the Dead*, a sort of

[1] Diod. i 96.

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itinerary or guide-book for the dead man, which told him where to go and what to do

Some such instruction must have been given in the Greek Mysteries. Plutarch[1] compares death to Initiation into the Great Mysteries. "First," he says, "come wanderings and wearisome mazes; fearful interminable passings through darkness; then, before the end, terrors manifold, shudderings, fear, sweat, and amazement. And forth from this a light that comes to meet you, pure places and meadows that receive you, songs and dances and holy apparitions." Thus much all might know, or the reverent Plutarch would not have told it; the secret that might not be told lay in the actual rites and words, the precise formularies probably of magical nature, taught by the hierophant to the initiate.

The Dionysos of the Mysteries.—Isis, the Mother, the Fruit-giver, the Law-giver, is obviously easy to blend with the old Earth-Mother, Demeter. Her aspect as Queen of the Shades reappears in Persephone wedded to Hades. The blending of Osiris with Dionysos is complex and needs explanation. This is the more necessary as, in connexion with the mystery god Dionysos,

[1] Frg. *De Anima.*

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there seems to have been developed a doctrine of the divine origin of man, what Pindar calls "the beginning given of the gods."

The Greek god Dionysos has absorbed into his personality two foreign divinities, originally distinct, a god of orgy and ecstasy from Thrace, and a mystery-god Zagreus, who is substantially the same as the Egyptian Osiris. The fusion of the two was made easy by the fact that each in turn appropriated the vine. The Thracian ecstasy-god was originally a beer-god, Sabazios; but as he came down into lower Greece he adopted the drink of the Southerners: his orgies and his throng of worshipping women were tolerated, moderated, but never held in really high repute. Osiris was the "culture hero" of collective Egypt; he introduced the vine and agriculture; with his worship was connected a vivid conviction of the immortality of the soul. The Zagreus of the Cretans[1] was practically indistinguishable from Osiris, and out of the two conceptions Sabazios and Osiris, linked by the vine, the Greeks compounded their strange, complex, beautiful Dionysos, and then affiliated him to Olympian theology as the son of Zeus and Semele.

Dionysos and Osiris.—Zagreus, the mystery-god,

[1] Eur. Frg. 475.

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is utterly unlike the Thracian ecstasy-god, as well as utterly unlike any Olympian, and that especially in three ways. In all these three ways he resembles, nay, he is identical with Osiris.

First, *the mystery-god is mortal;* he is torn to pieces, dies, comes to life again. The Olympians before all things are *im*mortal (*athanatoi*). For Greeks, as for Christians, only the god who dies and comes to life again can bring the hope of immortality; the prototype of such a god is Osiris, torn in fourteen pieces, put together again, resuscitated. The savage story of the rending of Osiris and the ritual it explained, rose probably from certain primitive rites of burial. The early inhabitants of Egypt practised what is known as "second burial," i.e. after decay the body was dismembered. Later, probably by borrowing from an immigrant race, they adopted the practice of mummification, which favoured a doctrine of the immortality of the body.

Second, in the cult of the mystery-god, *the worshipper becomes one with the god, and thereby immortal.* What Greek ever dreamt of union with Zeus or Athene or Apollo? But the worshipper of Cretan Zagreus *becomes Bacchos.*[1] In the Mysteries both of Demeter and Dionysos the

[1] Eur Frg. 475.

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aim, so far as the ceremonies are not merely agricultural, is union, always union, by eating the god, by marrying him, by being symbolically *born anew as him*. On an Orphic tablet the initiate soul is greeted with the words: "Thou art become God from man." The pure soul in the Egyptian under-world becomes Osiris. "I am the child of earth and of starry heaven," says the Orphic. Why? Because he *is* Osiris, and Osiris is child of Sibou, earth, and Nouit, heaven.

Third, *the worship of the mystery-god is ascetic*. No Olympian enjoined abstinence upon his worshippers; the Olympians were gods of this world, not of the next. But Egyptian religion, unlike Greek, was focussed on a future life. *This* life was one long purification. The soul in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*,[1] after its almost endless negative confession, cries aloud four times, "I am pure." The initiated Orphic on the tablets says, "Out of the Pure I come"; the Cretan worshipper of Zagreus, when he becomes a Bacchos, is "robed in pure white"; he abstains, not indeed from wine—such asceticism is only for the intemperate North—but, more humanely, from all flesh meat, and also from all ceremonial pollution of birth or death. Only by such as-

[1] Chapter cxxv.

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ceticism can he hope to free the divine element within him, and so be made one with the god; only so can he escape judgment at the hands of Rhadamanthys, who is but Ra of Amenti, and pass to the Elysian fields, whose very name is borrowed from the Egyptian "fields of Aalu." Illogically, side by side with crude beliefs in magical rites and formularies, we have in the Mysteries the germ at least of another conviction: "God thou art and unto God thou shalt return"; and in this conviction asceticism found its only and splendid justification.

Egyptian Influence on Mystery-gods.—The ritual of the Mysteries is deep-dyed with Egyptianism. The central figure Zagreus or Dionysos is fashioned on Osiris, and this Egyptian influence made itself felt in the other gods. The Olympians were too strong, too deep-rooted in tradition to be neglected, but they all went more or less into the mystery melting-pot. The mystical hymns known to us as "Orphic" show us, not the clear-cut living Olympians, but shadowy shapes blurred in outlines, bearing Olympian names, but really interchangeable silhouettes, half monotheistic, half pantheistic. "In all the rites of initiation and mysteries," says Proclus[1], "the gods exhibit

[1] Procl. *Ennead*, i. 6. 9.

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their shapes as many, and they appear changing often from one form to another; and now they are made manifest in the emission of formless light, now taking human shape, now again in other and different form." This reads almost like a direct description of Egyptian pantheism, of gods shifting and changing, now human, now animal, now the sun. Take away the names from the "Orphic" hymns, and it would often be impossible to say which god is addressed. Just the same is true of addresses to the Egyptian gods.

"Orphic" Mysticism.—In concluding his statement about Hesiod and Homer, Herodotus says: "*The poets who are said to have lived before these men lived, in my opinion, after them.*" He means the specially religious poets—Orpheus and Musaeus and the like—and these few words are all that, in his sketch of Greek religion, he devotes to the movement we know of as "Orphism." As to date he is probably right; of "Orphism" we know nothing definite till it emerges at Athens in the sixth century, that great religious century which gave birth to Confucius in China, to Gautama in India, to Jeremiah and Ezekiel in Israel, to Pythagoras in Greece, and, most significant of all for our purpose, saw Athens send to Crete, the home of the Mysteries, for Epimenides to "purify the people."

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Under the name of "Orphism" we class all those elements which are so signally absent in Homer, and of which literature consciously at least took little account—such are the sense of evil, the need for purification, the idea of a man-god incarnate and suffering, and, closely connected with these, the idea of man's immortality, of his ultimate escape from evil by renewed purgation in another world.

Such elements we have seen are, on the whole, non-Greek; they come from Crete and Egypt, perhaps in part from Thrace and Asia Minor; they were easily fused with primitive Pelasgian faith, with the undifferentiated *theoi* and their half-magical ritual. To the Olympian religion they were always alien; but "the important fact is that the mystical and 'enthusiastic' explanation of the world was never without its apostles in Greece, though the main current of speculation, as directed by Athens, set steadily contrariwise, in the line of getting bit by bit at the meaning of things through hard thinking." [1]

Orphic Mysticism and Greek Philosophy.—We have observed above (p. 15) that Greek religion was largely a literary product. The various elements —Pelasgian, Oriental, Hellenic—were "com-

[1] Mr. Gilbert Murray, *History of Ancient Greek Literature*, p 68.

posed" by Hesiod and Homer. Orphic mysticism, disregarded for the most part by poetry, at least by such poetry as has survived to us, was potent in its influence on another branch of Greek thought, on philosophy.

With Homer the philosopher could make no terms. As Plato[1] bitterly complains, the mythological stories Homer tells are "neither reverent to the gods nor profitable to us, nor consistent with themselves." Long before Plato's famous indictment of the poets, Xenophanes, himself a rhapsode, had laid his finger on the weak point of Homer's theology—its anthropomorphism. The gods in Homer were immoral; that was plain enough.

> Homer and Hesiod attribute to the gods
> All that is shame and blame to mortal man.

But, more than that, they were no gods at all, for they were many, and God is one:

> One God there is, greatest of gods and mortals,
> Not like to man is he in mind or body.
> All of him sees, all of him thinks and hearkens.
> But mortal man made gods in his own image,
> Like to himself in vesture, voice and body.
> Had they but hands, methinks, oxen and lions
> And horses would have made them gods like-fashioned,
> Horse-gods for horses, oxen-gods for oxen.

[1] *Rep.* ii. 380.

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We are often told that the supremacy of Zeus was the "first step to monotheism." Xenophanes reached his goal by a shorter road.

Philosophy adopts Pelasgian and Orphic rather than Olympian Religion.—The early philosophers find no help in Olympian Zeus, yet in the nature of things they cannot break wholly with religion, so they go back to the gods that were before Zeus—the vaguer potencies, the *theoi* and the nature-powers. Thales, the first to seek unity in things, taught that the world sprang from moisture; he looks back to old Okeanos (p.34), whom Zeus dared not summon to his Olympian council—Okeanos, who is the source rather than the father. Pherekydes, who tries to utilize Zeus, has to turn him by a false etymology into Zas the "Living One." The four-square "Hermae" reappear in the Orphic mystery-god Phanes:

> Four were the eyes of Phanes,
> Beholding this way and that way. [1]

Empedokles borrows from Orphism his insistence on guilt and purification and his cycle of reincarnations. Most of all is Plato indebted to primitive mythology and its Orphic developments [2]

[1] Herm. in *Plat. Phaedr.* p. 135.

[2] Mr. F. M. Cornford *Plato and Orpheus*: Class. Rev., Dec. 1903, p. 433.

for the impulse to some of his most profound and fruitful imaginations. His Cosmic Eros is an Orphic god; his inspired madness is from the religion of the Thracian Dionysos; his doctrine of the *elenchus*, of intellectual purgation, is based on the purification of the mysteries; his *Anamnesis*, "Remembering again" on the Orphic spring of Remembrance, Mnemosyne; nay, even his Ideas have about them the "clear shining light" of the beatific visions shown to the initiated. It is again the greatest who borrow most. The mystery-religion that was an impulse to a poet-philosopher had an influence on Greece less patent, but perhaps more vital, than all the gods and goddesses who lent material to Homer.

Conclusion.

History of Greek Religion yet to be Written.—One purpose of this brief, imperfect sketch will have been served if it has been made clear how complex and shifting a thing Greek religion was, and how much hard work remains to be done before any complete account of it can be given. That chapter of its history which relates to pre-Homeric religion is as yet only roughed out; the materials for the investigation of "Mycenaean"

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and "Minoan" religion, as they have been brought to light in Crete, came but yesterday into our hands. Next, the theology of Homer and Hesiod still bristles with difficulties. The Olympians have still to be taken one by one and examined to see what elements in Zeus, in Poseidon, in Athene and the rest are Pelasgian, what Oriental, what Hellenic or Northern. When we come to the religion of Orphism yet more difficult problems remain. What elements in the Mysteries are primitive Pelasgian, what imported, when and from whence? How much is borrowed direct from Egypt? how much by way of Crete, Phoenicia, or Asia Minor? How, in its early stages, did religion act on philosophy, philosophy re-act on religion? Finally, a difficult and delicate task, here, save for Homer, unattempted, yet for Greek religion peculiarly important, What was the attitude of each separate literary author —of Pindar, of the tragedians—to the various elements of this complex religion, his personal outlook and particular temperamental bias? How far did each modify the religious material ready to his hand?

Finally, if we would form any just estimate of the place and value of Greek religion, we must give up any lingering notion that religion

is in itself necessarily a good. Bound as we are by the body to contemplate the *seen*, it is indeed a step towards freedom that we so far loose ourselves as to think at all of the *unseen*. But the experiment is, as all history shows, fraught with danger. Our thoughts, acts, feelings, in relation to the unseen *may* be good thoughts; if so, we have a good religion: they *may* be bad thoughts, then we have a bad religion. In feeling, imagining for himself a god, man has often stumbled on a devil far, far worse than himself, a being to whom the superhuman power lent him by man expressed itself only or mainly in licence and cruelty; in a word, a man uncontrolled. It is the peculiar merit of Greek religion that from the outset, as we know it, these elements of licence and monstrosity, the outcome of ignorance and fear, were caught, controlled, transformed by two things—by a poetry whose characteristic it was to be civilized as well as simple, and by a philosophy that was always more than half poetry. For the Greeks, the darkness and dread of the Unseen was lighted, purified, quieted by two lamps —Reason and Beauty.

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Historical Summary.

I. Prehistoric. Undifferentiated Pelasgian Theoi. This period is hypothetical; in reality, no doubt, there were always foreign influences present.

Religious material. Fetich stones and trees. Heroes Blood-curses or Erinyes; Matriarchal goddesses. Nymphs and rivers.

II. Influences from East and South. CRETE (Pillar cults), Libya (Poseidon and Athena), Samothrace (Kabeiroi) etc. Especially Phoenician influence; (Hermes, elements in Aphrodite and Heracles). Dates most various.

III. Roughly 1500–1000 B.C. Influence from the north. Achaean or Hellenic invasions. The Olympian system. Patriarchal Gods; Zeus. The Blood-price instead of the Blood-curse.

IV. After 1000 B.C. The Olympian religion publicly professed, superseding the Pelasgian at its own sacred places. Delphi (Apollo and the Earth-Snake), Olympia (Zeus and Pelops). The old Pelasgian religion with its foreign elements is partly assimilated (Hera, Aphrodite, Poseidon), partly driven below the surface: (witchcraft, purification, mysteries).

V. 7th and 6th Century B.C. Re-emergence of the Pelasgian religion quickened by fear and the sense of sin produced especially by the calamities of the sixth century. This especially centred upon the worship of Dionysos-Zagreus, a combination of the Intoxication-God of Thrace and the Mystery-God of Crete. Orphism: purification by union of God and man. Intensest spiritual development of Greek religion. Orphism partly remains aloof, partly serves as a leaven in the current Olympian worship.

VI. 5th Century, Philosophy, derived partly from physical science, partly from mysticism, prevails among educated people, especially at Athens. It becomes connected with the rise of the Athenian democracy, and affects life and politics. The Sophists, Anaxagoras, Euripides.

VII. 4th Century B.C. to Christian Era. Fall of Athens. Divorce of philosophy from the world. Truce between philosophy and superstition. The educated man studies philosophy and makes Stoicism, Epicureanism or some form of Platonism his real religion, but in general refrains scrupulously from attacking traditional rites or disturbing the beliefs of the vulgar. Frequent irruptions of foreign religions, especially emotional religions from the East.

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